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**Subject:** EDF Blog post: West Virginia issues drinking water advisory for pregnant women in wake of chemical spill

<http://blogs.edf.org/health/>

## West Virginia issues drinking water advisory for pregnant women in wake of chemical spill

By [Richard Denison](#) | [Bio](#) | Published: January 15, 2014

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Shortly after 8pm this evening, the West Virginia Department of Health issued a “Water Advisory for Pregnant Women” in connection with last Thursday’s chemical spill. The news was first reported by Ken Ward, Jr. and David Gutman in the *West Virginia Gazette*.

The Advisory states:

*The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health advises, after consultation with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) this evening, that the CDC recommends—out of an abundance of caution—that pregnant women drink bottled water until there are no longer detectable levels of MCHM in the water distribution system. However, the CDC re-affirmed previous advice that it does not anticipate any adverse health effects from levels less than 1 ppm.*

*Guidance from the CDC is attached.*

Two other documents are available:

- A Frequently Asked Questions document on consumption of water by pregnant women developed by the state Department of Health and the CDC.
- A letter from the Director of the CDC to Secretary for Health in West Virginia recommending issuance of the Advisory.

It is unclear what prompted tonight’s issuance of the Advisory, which comes six days into the spill. However, one clue may be in the CDC letter, which states:

*Since making the initial calculations, scientists have obtained additional animal studies about MCHM. These are currently being reviewed. At this time, the scientists continue to recommend 1 ppm as a protective level to prevent adverse health effects. However, due to limited availability of data, and out of an abundance of caution, you may wish to consider an alternative drinking water source for pregnant women until the chemical is at non-detectable levels in the water*

*distribution system. (emphasis added)*

It appears the new information prompted the CDC recommendation that West Virginia consider advising women to avoid drinking the water, which raises the question as to whether the new animal studies suggest a potential for developmental toxicity or a related effect.

It should be noted that the answer to the first question in the FAQ document states: *“There are no known studies showing harm to the fetus as a result of consuming water with MCHM levels below 1 ppm.”*

Clearly something prompted the issuance of the advisory. I hope we’ll learn more shortly.

Questions have already been raised on this blog about the lack of data on this chemical and the methodology used by government officials to calculate the 1 ppm level. This new development, however, I believe lends even greater weight to the need for immediate public release of both all available studies and the methodology.

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